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ABSTRACT

With the 1964 Civil Rights Act, school segregation was to come to an end, but it may be that black students are still receiving a "colored" education. There are inequities and prejudices in U.S. institutions, and these have tremendous influences on how African Americans are perceived and accepted. The nation's African American students are disproportionately placed in special education, put on the slow track, or placed in low ability groups, and marked as having disciplinary problems. Administrative policies and practices, as well as teacher expectations about students' abilities and potential performances, affect curriculum placement as much as race, sex, and socioeconomic status. Through all of this, students are expected to do well on standardized tests. A test score alone is not a sufficient measure of aptitude, achievement, or educational abilities of African American students. African Americans must help motivate their children to succeed and to develop a sense of self-worth so that they do not settle for a "colored" education. (Contains 10 references.) (SLD)

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Are We Still Receiving a Colored Education? Education of Black Students

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Are We Still Receiving a Colored Education?
Education of Black Students

Abstract:

With the 1964 Civil Rights Act, school segregation was to come an end. But did it? During that time and before, African Americans were known as "colored". This paper will answer the questions; Are we still colored when it comes to education? Are we still considered second class citizens in the education arena? There are inequities and prejudices embedded in our institutions. These inequities and prejudices have tremendous influences on how we as African Americans are perceived and accepted. Our African American students are disproportionately placed in special education classes, put on the slow track or placed in low ability groups, and having disciplinary problems. Administrative policies and practices as well as teacher expectations about student's abilities and potential performances affect curriculum placement as much as student's race, sex, and socioeconomic status. Through all of this, students are expected to do well on standardized test. A test score alone is not a sufficient measure of aptitude, achievement, or educational abilities of African American students. The intent of this paper is to discuss whether there is equity in education.

Are We Still Receiving a Colored Education?
Education of Black Students

It has been thirty-two years since the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act in which school segregation was to come to an end. But has it? As I reflect back on my schools days during the 1950's and 60's, I ponder my education then and the education African Americans are receiving now. During the 50's and 60's African Americans received what was called a "colored education." This "colored education" was based on poor schools, old hand-me-down books, and large classes. I recall long bus rides to the only Black high school, Wiley H. Bates, in Annapolis, Maryland. In route, several "white" high schools were passed. Every now and then, the question would cross my mind as to what it was like "in there." Although we had out-dated materials, Bates' teachers did the best they could. Until this day, I can still recall the support, caring, and nurturing by the whole faculty. This brings to mind a book *When We Were Colored,* Clifton Taulbert,1989, a story of him growing-up in segregated Glen Allan, Mississippi in the 1950's. The themes permeating through the book were of support, encouragement and praise. Even with the lack of materials and teachers as deprived as he was, he made it. We both have "made it", although it was not easy. If we as a people survived segregation at its worst; why can't we now? We don't have to settle for a "colored education."

It is well known that there are deficiencies when it comes to educating African American students. At present, black children and youth are at the bottom of almost every major criterion of academic achievement. On the average, Blacks

receive the lowest intelligence and achievement test scores (Humphreys, 1988), are more likely to be suspended or expelled (Taylor & Foster, 1986), are more likely to be enrolled in general level or vocational classes rather than more academically rigorous classes (Oakes, 1988), and are more likely to be overrepresented in special education classes for the educationally handicapped (Reschly, Kichlighter, & McKee, 1988) and underrepresented in classes for the gifted (Baldwin, 1987). If the above statements are true then: Are African American students still segregated in the public schools? Are African Americans still considered "colored" and receiving a "colored" or inferior education in today's society? How are ability grouping, test scores and discipline used to foster institutional racism?

For years school systems have divided students into so called academic categories based on ability grouping and tracking. Ability grouping in high schools is quite common and usually has two to three tracks. If it is a two track system, the groupings are college bound or non college - bound; for a three track system, gifted, average, and remedial. The gifted track is usually given demanding curriculum with demanding standards of performance.

In the schools, ability grouping and tracking mean denying students of color equal educational opportunities. This is creating a caste system within the classroom. The ability to move upward is next to impossible and will continue to be so until African Americans empower themselves to stand up to and against institutional racism.

Ability grouping and tracking send messages to Black students that they are not good enough to receive quality education and that only whites have power, knowledge, and opportunities to be successful. These messages merely reflect racial inequalities in society. Students in the lower track are stigmatized and usually receive different instruction and interest from the administrators and

teachers. The tracking system relates also to the gifted and talented students. There is an assumption that poor and minority students, especially African Americans, are disadvantaged and deprived, therefore, cannot quality for gifted and talented status. (Wilson, 1989) So these students are placed in vocational and general tracks.

Are these all forms of institutional racism? Racism not based on individual acts of prejudice but on inequities and prejudices embedded in the institutions. Institutional racism is covert, and indirect. It is like a brand that labels from birth. Black students suffer from institutional discrimination in many ways, but particularly in IQ. testing, classroom ability grouping, and negative teacher attitudes. Institutional racism can also be illustrated by our hand-me-down history books that did not tell of our contributions to America to Gerrymandering to keep some school districts black while drawing voting lines to prevent minority voters from achieving proportional representation.

Educators have a charge to keep: to eradicate tracking, and ability grouping. The negative messages these strategies bring only will continue to foster racism in the schools and classrooms. Every effort has to be made to have heterogeneous grouping and cooperative learning strategies in the classroom.

Students can be placed in mixed achievement groups to work with other students of high, middle, and low achievement levels to form cooperative learning groups. This will allow each level of student degrees of success. There can be another group strategy using common and mutual goals in which there can be positive interdependence. The labor is divided so each student is responsible for certain roles to complete the task. These roles can be based on academic and non-academic strengths. Sometimes face-to-face interaction is needed. There is interaction between the students that can be verbal, showing mutual support and provide assistance to each other. Students must be given the time to use their

social skills. Working relationship must be maintain within the group in order for the group to be effective.

If the above strategies are utilized the culture of the classroom will mirror the average and high track classes. Heterogeneous grouping allows students of varying backgrounds, interests, and cultures to share in the learning experiences. It, therefore, becomes apparent that ability grouping, teacher expectations, race, and socioeconomic status play a part in Black students' scholastic success or failure. Tracking and ability grouping has few benefits for students on the high track but major disadvantages for low ability grouped students. Non-tracking and nonability grouping are ways for African Americans not to receive a "colored education".

There are various methods used to track students initially: standardized test, grades, mental age, administrative/ teacher recommendations, and teaches' expectations. During the course of a day teachers interact with students an average of six hours. The teacher is a major force in students' lives which can be negative or positive. A positive teacher influences by encouraging and challenging students to excel academically as well as socially. A negative teacher, has low expectations of students and conveys this knowingly or unknowingly. The teachers' expectation can be a self- fulfilling prophecy. If it is perceived to be true, it is true. Also, teachers make decisions based on their attitudes and expectations. If teachers believe students are incapable of learning, then that prophecy will become true for they will behave in ways that bring about what is expected. This self -fulfilling prophecy has been supported in a 1968 study - *Pygmalion in the Classroom*, Rosenthal and Jacobson. This fifteen years of research study found teacher expectancy of some type occurred in two-thirds of the 345 studied reviewed. Teachers show low expectations by waiting less time for low students to answer questions, criticize more often for failure, fail to

give feedback, call on less often, seat farther away from teacher, demand less from low students, and use less effective and more time-consuming instructional methods with low students (Brophy, 1983).

Consistently, African Americans have been and systematically excluded from educational benefits. The low expectations have a devastating affect on tests. There is no wonder why their test scores are consistently lower than whites. Yet, their scores are suppose to equal whites. However, test scores alone are not sufficient measure of aptitude, and achievement. Some schools use test scores as a mean to recreate what is no longer able to do by law; separation of the races in the classroom.

Why aren't African American receiving higher test scores? Are there problems with the test or the academic background? I believe the answer is a combination of both. Looking at ability grouping, African Americans are in tracks that do not have high level courses in math, science, and reading. Black students may not have guidance counseling necessary to make important academic decisions. Students therefore, may be placed in nonacademic curriculum with few if any challenging classes. By not being in classes that stress math, science, and reading, the exposure to meaningful instruction is limited; benefits and rewards of education are also limited. The students' exposure to meaningful academic work cannot be limited. If limited, then how can students show high test performance? The tests do not measure the rich knowledge base of the African American student. Therefore, it is not the student that has to change but the tests.

Standardized test may have to be given but the results should be used differently. Test scores must be used to facilitate academic achievement among low-income Blacks not to further depress their expectations (Johnson, 1989). Instructional activities are needed to motivate the learners and to know that what they are learning will benefit them in positive ways. A climate of high expectations

must be present in the schools and maintained. Time and planning are needed to create high-quality instruction for school use and transferred to the homes.

Caution however, should be taken when examining the results of test and making inferences from the scores. Testing needs to be kept in the proper perspective; that is to recognize that tests are only part of the picture when examining and appraising achievements. While it may be impossible to create a culture-free test, standardized testing can be developed to enhance student confidence and academic self- image. The measurement of Black children has drawn the interest of many researchers, but only a small percentage of such researchers are Black themselves, (Johnson, 1989). If a measurement tool is to be administered to Blacks, then Black scholars, professionals, and graduate students should be drafted to create such measuring tool. Criterion-referenced tests can be used, for these tests; are based on what has been taught and students can have mastery of specific materials. Other means of assessments such as oral reports, projects, skits, and discussions can be just as helpful as formal testing.

Are African American students receiving a "colored education" when it comes to discipline? More African Americans students than students of other ethnic groups are placed in behavior classes, special education and expelled or suspended from school due to inappropriate behavior. Students are commonly placed in special education classes when it is the students' behavior rather than their ability that causes problems (Kuykendall, 1992). It may not be possible to like all students, but it is possible to treat all with dignity and respect. There are no "bad children", just "inappropriate behavior." As educators, we need to closely examine the reasons why this is happening to our Black students. Failure to do so may bring more harm than good.

Teachers cannot survive without effective classroom management. Students are quite perceptive and can sense the climate of the class and the teacher is an integral part of the class and climate. African American students, especially male, need structure and organization. Students must not feel as though they are intruders and unwelcomed. A disruptive negative behavior may be the result if students perceive an unwelcomed climate. Some disruptive students are restless and bored; some are venting their frustrations. Some may feel the loss of hope and the unlikeliness of being successful in school. Some have been stripped of hope by institutional racism. Some are responding to unequal and unfair treatment. A thread that will start the mending process is to provide students frequent opportunities to be successful.

There may be external causes for student misbehavior. Families and peers are major players in influencing students. Negative influences spill into the classroom when teachers are perceived to be the enemy. When one enemy is against another there is bound to be battles which can become wars.

In order to reduce battles, teachers must first examine themselves. 'What attitudes, behaviors, and thoughts are they bringing to the classroom?" The offense is separate from the offender and has to be dealt with on that basis. Most classrooms are teacher centered and do not allow for interaction nor having students being part of classroom management. A student centered classroom would allow students to be a part of the decision making process that governs them. Students then have ownership and will support what they own. In this way students are responsible for their own behavior and know the consequences if they do not comply to their rules and regulations.

All student are gifted and talented in some way. Just a minor thing can get the dullest of light to shine if only given the opportunity. Creative, effective and assertive teachers can find ways of turning on the light. African American

students will engage in disruptive behavior when they are not given the opportunity to succeed at something. This succeeding at something maybe from non-academic areas such as art, or music.

A journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. We, as African Americans are in some cases still standing at the starting line. We must stand up for what is right and fair. We must take steps to control our neighborhoods, schools demand greater opportunities for our children, and work for a life that is truly free. Some of the responsible must be with the students to become motivated and have the zeal to become all that they can be. Motivation buried deep within has to rise to the surface. We must help our Black children to have that burning desire to succeed, develop a sense of self-worth, set goal and keep the eye on the prize. Then no longer do we as a race of people have to settle for a "colored education".

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